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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR LISBETH KEEFE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: MARCH 09, 2005

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FPOe: Re-Launch or Re-Orientation?  
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1. The current struggles within the government coalition party FPOe continue, all Austrian media report. Carinthian Governor Joerg Haider insists the Freedom Party is to be "re-launched" in the wake of a continuing decline in voter support. It is not clear what changes are being planned, but Haider told ORF television's late night news "ZiBII" yesterday that unless there was a "new start, something would happen." Haider's comments followed the party's announcement yesterday that several hardliners were being removed from the party's executive committee. According to semi-official daily "Wiener Zeitung," the Carinthian Governor's move has merely aggravated the crisis, as party chairperson Ursula Haubner still claims a "re-orientation" of the party will suffice. Meanwhile, Austrian radio reports that Haider and Haubner are to hold a joint press conference later today, where it is expected they will outline details regarding the FPOe's future course.

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Reactions to FPOe Upheaval  
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2. All Austrian media report on the reactions of the country's main political parties to the ongoing FPOe struggle. Liberal daily "Der Standard" quotes Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel as saying that, for him, "nothing has changed at this point. I am working together with the people I've been working with in the past." Right now, he would "wait and see how the discussion within the FPOe plays out." Meanwhile, semi-official daily "Wiener Zeitung" quotes SPOe Party Manager Norbert Darabos as stating that the FPOe's "real problem within the government is the fact that it is merely the uncritical and compliant tool for Schuessel's policies." Greens security spokesperson Peter Pilz urged containing "as much as possible the damage to Austria and Carinthia from the FPOe's 'bankruptcy case.'"

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Minister Pushes Headscarf Ban  
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3. Austria's Muslim community has sharply criticized a suggestion by Interior Minister Liese Prokop that Muslim women teachers in the country could be banned from wearing headscarves in Austrian schools. In an interview with today's Vienna weekly magazine "Falter," Prokop stressed that she has "a problem with teachers wearing headscarves in public schools. I find it offensive, because it is not compatible with the values of our society." Although she has not yet looked into "whether a ban on headscarves is legally possible," she is "in favor of a ban," Prokop stressed. According to Austrian radio, Omar al-Rawi, the integration envoy for the Austrian Islamic community said Prokop's statements are a "slap in the face" for Muslim women. All Austrian media report on the Interior Minister's suggestion. Liberal daily "Der Standard" writes that Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel has stressed the issue was within the Education Ministry's responsibility. Education Minister Elisabeth Gehringer underscored that there is "no headscarf ban in Austria, and there are no problems" in connection with this matter.

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Fischer Visits Schroeder  
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4. Austrian President Heinz Fischer met German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and his German counterpart Horst Koehler during a one-day working visit in Germany yesterday. According to semi-official daily "Wiener Zeitung," Fischer and Schroeder discussed the visit of US President George W.

Bush to Europe, the visit to Austria of Croatian President Stipe Mesic, as well as the situation in the Middle East, in Iran and the Ukraine. Centrist daily "Die Presse" writes that the two presidents agreed the Ukraine "needs a European perspective." While this "should not suggest the equivalent of EU membership for the Ukraine," both the EU and the Ukraine would "benefit" from such a course. For Kiev, EU membership is "not on the agenda for the foreseeable future," both leaders stressed. Liberal daily "Der Standard" notes the German Chancellor is to visit Vienna next week.

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Iran's Nuclear Program: Too Secret for US Intelligence Services  
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15. headlines ORF online news and says that, according to newspaper reports, a commission appointed by US President George W. Bush has described as "insufficient" the information provided by US intelligence services on Iran's nuclear program. According to the commission's study, the information available is not good enough to allow for clear statements on Tehran's weapons program, ORF online explains, sourcing the "New York Times."

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Suicide Blast in Baghdad Kills Three  
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16. An explosion occurred this morning in the Iraqi capital Baghdad. Police say a suicide bomber blew up a garbage truck close to Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture, killing himself and at least three others, Austrian radio early morning news "Morgenjournal" reports. According to reports, insurgents wearing police uniforms first shot dead a guard at the ministry's gate, allowing the truck to enter the compound.

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Chechen Rebel Leader Killed  
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17. Russian special forces have killed Chechen rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov near the country's capital Grosny. Maskhadov was president of Chechnya in the 1990s and was seen as the most moderate of the rebel commanders. Moscow alleges he was involved in Chechen rebel operations, including the Moscow theater siege and the Beslan school massacre, writes mass-circulation daily "Kurier." The daily quotes Russian President Vladimir Putin as underscoring that a "lot of work still needs to be done in Chechnya." An expert on Chechnya, however, stressed on Austrian radio that Maskhadov was "one of the moderates, with whom Moscow could have negotiated." The expert says he is concerned that one outcome of the operation may be that it "plays into the hands of extremists."

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Pro-Syrian Demonstration in Beirut  
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18. Syrian troops have begun a partial withdrawal from southern and northern Lebanon, Austrian media report. Lebanon's Defense Minister Mrad said Syrian forces were to move to the eastern Bekka Valley beginning last night, according to Austrian radio. The move came just hours after hundreds of thousands gathered in Beirut to support Syria's role in the country. The demonstration was organized by Hezbollah, and was much larger than earlier opposition protests, which urged Syrian troops to leave. Mass-circulation daily "Kurier" also reports on the demonstrations in Beirut, and adds that US President Bush in a speech on the Middle East warned that autocratic regimes did not have a future in the region. Both Syria and Iran would have to immediately stop supporting terrorism, Bush emphasized.

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Former Kosovo PM to Face War Crime Charges  
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19. The former Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, is due to fly to the United Nations tribunal in The Hague, after being charged with war crimes. His indictment is related to his role in the Kosovo conflict. Haradinaj, a former commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army, says he is innocent, and that the charges brought against him are "politically motivated," writes mass-circulation daily "Kurier." Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Erhard Busek said in an interview with the "Kurier" that the effect of Haradinaj's indictment in the region "depends on how stable the Kosovo government is." Dealing with the ghosts of the past is an integral part of everyday politics in the region, Busek underscored. On the part of the EU, there was often no comprehensive strategy for the entire southeastern European area. While it was necessary to bring war criminals to justice, the issue was also how this was done, the Coordinator underscored. This

included explaining to the countries in question the necessity of such a strategy.  
Brown